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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2261  
INFO RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 7599  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 6424  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1902  
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 1647  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 7563  
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 3603  
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 2102  
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 004291

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SUBJECT: RED MOSQUE RE-OPENS FOLLOWING SUPREME COURT  
DECISION

REF: ISLAMABAD 3290

Classified By: Ambassador Anne W. Patterson, for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)  
)

¶1. (U) A two-member Supreme Court bench ordered October 2 the re-opening of Islamabad's Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) and two thousand people gathered there today (October 3) for afternoon prayers. The mosque has remained closed since the July military operation against followers of Maulana Abdul Aziz and Maulana Abdur Rashid Ghazi (reftel). In an unexpected move, the government appointed Aziz's nephew as the mosque's temporary Naib Imam.

¶2. (U) The Court also ordered the reconstruction of adjoining madrassa Jamia Hafsa and compensation payments to victims' families. However, the Court simultaneously allowed the Capital Development Authority (CDA) to expedite construction of an Islamic research facility, which would encroach on Jamia Hafsa land. This was the original bone of contention between the government and the former imams, sparking a four-month standoff.

¶3. (C) Comment: The re-opening of the Red Mosque and its return to the hands of its former leadership is an unwelcome development. The mosque and adjacent madrassa have long been centers and rallying points for violent extremism in the heart of Islamabad's moderate capital. Interior Minister Sherpao has told us that the GOP has evidence linking the Red Mosque leadership to extremism in the tribal areas and suicide bombings in Islamabad. One such bombing occurred the same day that the GOP tried to re-open the Red Mosque the last time. Al Qaeda's latest video specifically cited the GOP's Red Mosque operation in rallying forces against Musharraf and the Pakistan government. Today's re-opening was peaceful, and the court's decision may represent its attempt to seek middle ground between the government and followers of the mosque. However, it is hard to see how opening the door for the mosque to resume its position as a platform and safehaven for militant extremists can benefit anyone but the extremists. End comment.

PATTERSON